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A young RM3 within a few months of his discharge was trying to earn extra money to give himself a good start in civilian life. He had requested and received permission from his Navy command to work with a contractor on base, painting radio towers.

To do this job, the RM3 had to climb the towers with a safety harness or go up in a motorized manlift, with a vertical lifeline and a safety harness attached. Once he reached the working platform, it was OK with the contractor to remove the harness. The platform was fully enclosed with tarps, which the contractor felt protected the workers from falling. Although he was uneasy at first (after all, he had no training in climbing towers), the RM3 soon felt comfortable enough to remove his safety harness while working on a platform.

One day, he and another worker went above the 200-foot level of a tower in the manlift, then tied it to the tower. Once on the platform, they removed their harnesses and started painting. A contractor employee in charge of safety later climbed up to the platform—without fall protection—to check on the job's progress.

At this point, the RM3 (without his fall protection) entered the manlift and, for some reason, was trying to go down. He didn't realize one of the activation devices was wired backwards, causing the machine to go up when you pushed "down." When you activated this faulty device, one side went down, while the other went up, trying to pick up a 3,000-pound counterweight used to keep the platform from blowing in the wind.

With the platform now unstable, the other worker (also without his fall protection) entered the platform and tried to level the manlift. The ropes holding it to the tower broke, and the manlift dropped about 67 feet before stopping suddenly and throwing the RM3 180 feet to his death.

The other worker was knocked unconscious and suffered injuries but stayed in the manlift. The safety representative, meanwhile, remained on the platform and witnessed everything. A base EMT rescued the injured worker, while fire-division personnel from the base stood by at the base of the tower.

Officials from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) cited the contractor for several violations, and he subsequently was required to work under the 100 percent fall-protection system. The CO of the facility also hired a private contracting source to provide fall-protection and rescue training to everyone working on towers.

It never pays to take shortcuts. If PPE is required for a job, wear it until the job is complete. Before this mishap occurred, OSHA believed the

platform was a fixed model. The fact it was a suspended model made the contractor's practice a violation of federal standards.

We devote a lot of time to training our people so they are qualified to do their jobs. With lives at stake, we can't afford to do less.

Finally, if you run into trouble on a job, step back and evaluate your situation. Apply the principles of operational risk management to find the best method to fix your problem. Rushing to get the job done is just inviting injury or death. A

